

FULL SOUND ENHANCEMENT USING MULTI-INPUT SOUND SIGNALS

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RELATED APPLICATIONS

Reference is hereby made to commonly assigned and copending U.S. patent application METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SOUND EXPANSION, Serial No. 0 / [Attorney Docket No. 49617-P021US-966319], filed concurrently herewith, and copending U. S. patent application ~~STEREO-ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM INCLUDING SOUND LOCALIZATION SYSTEM~~, Serial No. 08/511,788, filed August 7, 1995, which applications are incorporated herein by reference.

now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,714,556

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a sound enhancing system and more particularly to a system and method for providing full sound image coverage when a listener has less than the full compliment of speakers required to hear all of the available sound.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are sound systems available which provide a listener with a full sound experience such that the reproduced sound appears to come to the listener as though it were being played "live" in the presence of the listener.

The DOLBY (a trademark of Dolby Labs) surround systems are typical of such systems where a listener can enjoy a full range of sound spread out in a three dimensional pattern around the listener. One major drawback to such systems is that they require more than the traditional two (left and right) speakers. Typically, these systems require at least three (the third being a center speaker for speech and other "centered" sounds) and usually also require two rear speakers. For maximum enjoyment at least one sub-woofer is also required so that the listener can hear and perhaps even feel sounds in the range from 100 Hz and below. In addition, most existing surround systems provide the same sound to both rear speakers. An example of a system in which the rear speakers have the same sound signals is Dolby ProLogic.

New systems are coming on the market whereby an improvement has been made in that the rear speakers actually receive different sound signals thereby creating a left and right effect to the rear of the listener. An example of a prior art system in which the rear speakers have different sound signals is Dolby Digital (AC3).

5 The above-described systems assume a very import parameter that simply is not true in most situations. The assumption is that listeners of the sound system will have the five (or more) speakers necessary to take advantage of the full range of the sound systems. Most people simply can not afford to, or choose not to, install in their listening area the number (and quality) of speakers necessary for enjoyment of these full sound systems. Also, most people have more than one location from which they wish to listen to music, the TV, etc., and the need for five (or more) speakers limits their listening options considerably.

10 Furthermore, computer enthusiasts are precluded from taking advantage of the surround sound systems described above where use of more than two speakers is awkward.

15 Accordingly, a need exists in the art for a system which can accept the five sound signal inputs (left front, right front, center front, left rear and right rear) for a surround sound system and to convert those signal inputs for presentation to left and right front speakers while still maintaining the full sound experience for the listener.

20 A further need exists in the art for such a system in which the sound signal inputs for the rear speakers can be either the same or different for each speaker.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

These and other objects and features of our invention are achieved by a system and method whereby in a first embodiment the five sound signal inputs from a full sound system (left front, right front, center, left rear, right rear) are converted to sound signals for presentation to left and right front speakers while preserving for the listener the perception that the sound is coming from fully around the listener. The system is designed such that speech and other front center speaker sounds still are perceived as coming from the center front while sounds which would be directed to the left and right rear speakers appear to the listener as coming from the same area as the "missing" rear speakers.

In an alternate embodiment, we have designed a system and method which will accept five sound signal inputs where the rear sound signals can be identical for both rear speakers or can be different for the two rear speakers.

In a second alternate embodiment, we have designed a system and method which will accept the five sound signal inputs and expand the sound from the front and rear pairs of speakers so that the sound appears to a listener to be coming from locations beyond the physical boundaries of the five speakers.

The embodiments discussed above take advantage of sound expansion techniques known in the art and on techniques based on copending patent application entitled METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SOUND EXPANSION. The prior art techniques for sound positioning are disclosed in U.S. Patents 5,105,462 and 5,208,860 issued to Lowe et al. on April 14, 1992, and May 4, 1993, respectively, which are hereby incorporated by reference herein, and which are illustrations of systems for positioning sound images at any desired location around a listener. The Lowe patents take a monaural sound image input and position that sound image at a

selected location. The systems discussed in the above-identified patents is herein referred to as the Q1 system.

Techniques for stereo expansion are disclosed in U.S. Patent 5,440,638 issued to Lowe et al. on August 8, 1995 and incorporated by reference herein. The system discussed in the above identified patent is herein referred to as the QX system.

Thus, it is one technical advantage of our system and method that a five input sound signal system can be processed in a manner that will allow the sound to be expanded so that it will appear to a listener as though it emanates from five speakers while only two speakers are used.

It is a further technical advantage that the system will operate properly in situations where the sound signal inputs which would be directed to the two rear speakers have the same content and when they have different content.

It is a still further technical advantage of our system that it can be used in situations where the listener has five speakers placed around a listening area or when the listener has only two speakers and the sound input for the rear speakers is monaural or stereo.

The foregoing has outlined rather broadly the features and technical advantages of the present invention in order that the detailed description of the invention that follows may be better understood. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be described hereinafter which form the subject of the claims of the invention. It should be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the conception and the specific embodiment disclosed may be readily utilized as a basis for modifying or designing other structures for carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. It should also be realized by those skilled in the art that such equivalent

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constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention, and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

5 FIGURES 1A, 1B and 1C show embodiments of our invention for operation where the rear speaker inputs are different, together with a pictorial of the speaker placement and a diagram of the enhanced sound image as perceived by a listener;

10 FIGURES 2A, 2B and 2C show other embodiments of our invention where the rear speaker inputs are the same, together with a pictorial of the speaker placement and a diagram of the enhanced sound image as perceived by a listener;

15 FIGURES 3A, 3B and 3C show still other embodiments of our invention for providing enhanced sound imaging for use in situations where the listener has five speakers and the sound signals for the rear speaker are monaural, together with a pictorial of the speaker placement and a diagram of the enhanced sound images as perceived by a listener;

20 FIGURES 4A, 4B and 4C show still other embodiments of our invention for providing enhanced sound imaging for use in situations where the listener has five speakers and the sound signals for the rear speaker are stereo, together with a pictorial of the speaker placement and a diagram of the enhanced sound images as perceived by a listener; and

FIGURE 5 shows a monaural to stereo conversion circuit, also referred to as a 1₂3D circuit;

25 FIGURE 6 shows an omni to stereo conversion circuit, also referred to as an OMNI₂3D circuit;

FIGURE 7 shows the prior art Q1 circuit for producing a left virtual image; and

FIGURES 8A and 8B show different versions of the QX circuit.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Before beginning a detailed discussion of the operation of the various embodiments of our invention it should be noted that the detailed operation of the 1₂3D, OMNI₂3D, Q1, single and dual QX circuits, various
5 embodiments of which are shown in FIGURES 5, 6, 7, 8A and 8B, respectively, together with sound enhancement diagrams, can be found in the above-discussed copending patent application and patents. These details will not be repeated herein.

Turning now to FIGURE 1A, there is shown circuit 10 which is
10 designed to accept five sound signal inputs, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 and to combine the rear sound signals with the front sound images to provide an enhanced full dimensional sound output image to listener 100 via only left speaker 16 and right speaker 17. To date, prior art systems have only been
15 able to combine five input signals to produce the left 16, right 17 and center 110 sound images as shown in FIGURE 1B. FIGURE 1C shows sound images 120, 121 and 122 perceived by listener 100 when the sound input signals are processed by circuit 10.

As shown in FIGURE 1A left and right front inputs 11 and 12 are provided as respective inputs to QX filter 101. This QX filter can be either
20 that shown in FIGURE 8A or in FIGURE 8B. The left and right outputs of filter 101 then form one input to each of summers 104 and 106, the other input to each of these summers is the output of attenuator 102. Attenuator 102 provides an attenuation of center input 13 in the range of -6dB to zero with -3dB in a preferred embodiment. The output of summers 104 and 106
25 are input to the input of summers 105 and 107, respectively. The other input to each of summers 105 and 107 come from the left and right outputs of expansion circuit 103. Note, that in situations where a center speaker is available, the input for the center speaker would be presented to the center speaker without attenuation and without being summed with
30 the other speaker signals.

Expansion circuit 103 receives rear left and right stereo sound signal inputs 14 and 15 and converts that input to an expanded sound image by using a pair of the circuits shown in FIGURE 7 or preferably the circuit shown in FIGURE 6.

5 In another embodiment, expansion circuit 103 may be comprised of either of the circuits shown in FIGURES 8A and 8B if attenuators 1615 and 1619 effectuate an attenuation in the range of approximately -20 dB to approximately -80dB.

10 The output of summers 105 and 107 form the inputs to speakers 16 and 17 to create the sound enhanced image shown in FIGURE 1C.

Turning now to FIGURE 2A there is shown circuit 20 which is designed to accept four different sound signal inputs, 11, 12, 13, and 21, where input 21 is a monaural signal for presentation to the rear two speakers of a five-speaker system. Circuit 20 combines the rear sound
15 signal inputs with the front sound signal inputs to provide an enhanced full dimensional sound output image to listener 100 via left speaker 16 and right speaker 17. To date, prior art systems have only been able to combine five input signals to produce the left 16, right 17, and center 210 sound images as shown in FIGURE 2B. FIGURE 2C shows sound images
20 220, 221 and 222 perceived by listener 100 when the sound input signals are processed by circuit 20.

As shown in FIGURE 2A left and right front inputs 11 and 12 are provided as respective inputs to QX filter 101. As discussed above, this QX filter can be either that shown in FIGURE 8A or in FIGURE 8B. The left
25 and right outputs of filter 101 then form one input to each of summers 104 and 106, the other input to each of these summers comes from a 3dB attenuation, via box 102, of center input 13. The output of summers 104 and 106 are input to summers 105 and 107, respectively. The other inputs

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to summers 105 and 107 come from the left and right outputs of expansion circuit 201.

Expansion circuit 201 receives a monaural sound signal 21, which can come from various sources such as, by way of example, from the rear "surround" outputs of the above-mentioned Dolby ProLogic system. Circuit 201 operates to convert that monaural input to an expanded sound image by using the circuit shown in FIGURE 5 or preferably the circuit shown in FIGURE 6.

The output of summers 105 and 107 form the inputs to speakers 16 and 17, respectively, to create the sound enhanced image shown in FIGURE 2C.

Turning now to FIGURE 3A there is shown circuit 30 which is designed to accept four different sound signal inputs, 11, 12, 13, and 21, where input 21 is a monaural signal for presentation to the rear two speakers of a five-speaker system. Circuit 30 operates in situations where all five speakers are present to provide an enhanced full dimensional sound output image to listener 100 via left speaker 16, right speaker 17, center speaker 31, rear left speaker 32, and rear right speaker 33. FIGURE 3B illustrates the sound images which are produced by prior art systems in which there are five input sound signals in which the input to the rear speakers is monaural. FIGURE 3C shows sound images 320 and 321 perceived by listener 100 when the sound input signals are processed by circuit 30.

As shown in FIGURE 3A left and right front inputs 11 and 12 are provided as respective inputs to QX filter 101. As discussed above, this QX filter can be either that shown in FIGURE 8A or in FIGURE 8B. The left and right outputs of filter 101 then form the input to the front left and right speakers 16 and 17 in a five-speaker system.

Center input 13 goes directly to center speaker 31 without modification.

Expansion circuit 201 receives a monaural sound signal 21, which can come from various sources such as, by way of example, from the rear "surround" outputs of the above-mentioned Dolby ProLogic sound system. Circuit 201 operates to convert that monaural input to an expanded sound image by using the circuit shown in FIGURE 5 or preferably the circuit shown in FIGURE 6. The output of circuit 201 forms the inputs to left rear and right rear speakers 32 and 33 to create the sound enhanced image shown in FIGURE 3C.

Turning now to FIGURE 4A, there is shown circuit 40 which is designed to accept five different sound signal inputs, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, where inputs 14 and 15 are full stereo inputs for presentation to the rear two speakers 32 and 33 of a five-speaker system. Circuit 40 operates in situations where all five speakers are present to provide an enhanced full dimensional sound output image to listener 100 via left speaker 16, right speaker 17, center speaker 31, left rear speaker 32 and right rear speaker 33. FIGURE 4B illustrates the sound images which are produced by prior art systems in which there are five input sound signals in which the input to the rear speakers is monaural. FIGURE 4C shows sound images 420 and 421 perceived by listener 100 when the sound input signals are processed by circuit 40.

As shown in FIGURE 4A, left and right front inputs 11 and 12 are provided as respective inputs to QX filter 101. As discussed above, this QX filter can be either that shown in FIGURE 8A or in FIGURE 8B. The left and right outputs of filter 101 then form the input to the front left and right speakers 16 and 17, respectively, in a five-speaker system.

Center input 13 goes directly to center speaker 31 without modification.

Expansion circuit 401 receives a stereo input signal 14 and 15, which can come from various sources such as, by way of example, from the rear speaker signals of the Dolby AC3 outputs of the above-mentioned Dolby surround sound system. Circuit 401 operates to enhance the stereo rear speaker input to an expanded sound image by using the circuit shown in FIGURES 8A or 8B or preferably the circuit shown in FIGURE 6. The circuit shown in FIGURE 8B can be used as shown or in a modified form with attenuators 1615 and 1619 set to -80dB or greater. This enables the circuit in Figure 8B to operate more like a pair of Q1 filters such as those used in the circuit in Figure 6. The outputs of circuit 401 form the inputs to left rear and right rear speakers 32 and 33, respectively, to create the sound enhanced image shown in FIGURE 4C.

It should be noted that the essential difference between FIGURES 1A, 2A and FIGURES 3A, 4A is the elimination of the summing circuits. The elimination of summing switches may be effectuated by a switch (not shown), thus permitting a single system to handle 2-, 3-, 4- or 5-speaker configurations. The use of subwoofers and other sound enhancement transducers is left out for convenience. The concepts discussed herein could work as well for such components.

Also note that as used herein, a two-speaker system is a system having right and left front sound transducers. A three-speaker system includes an additional center front speaker. A five-speaker system adds rear left and right (either stereo or monaural) speakers, while one four-speaker system eliminates the front center speaker. A second four-speaker configuration would have left front, center front, right front and a monaural surround sound speaker in the rear.

While the concepts of our invention are discussed in relation to Dolby sound systems they will work on any type of sound system having different front and rear sound input signals. One example of such other systems is the sound system for the DVD audio-visual format. The system

can also be used with signals available from different sources such as from a telephone or computer system working in conjunction with a separate sound source. In addition, while a five input set of signals has been shown and discussed the number of input signals is not critical. Also, it is
5 important to note that although it has been assumed that the front speaker input will be stereo the system will work with a monaural front speaker input by substituting the mono to expanded stereo process for the QX filter.

The invention can be arranged to work with various combinations of
10 "n" input signals and "x" playback speakers. For example, a single input ("n=1") can be expanded to stereo ("x=2") or a set of left, center and right input signals ("n=3") can be processed to produce an expanded stereo sound field for playback over a pair of stereo speakers ("x=2"). Thus, the invention is very flexible since the number of inputs can be greater than
15 the number of speakers ("n>x"), the number of inputs can be equal to the number of speakers ("n=x") or the number of inputs can be less than the number of speakers ("n<x").

Although the present invention and its advantages have been
described in detail, it should be understood that various changes,
20 substitutions and alterations can be made herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.